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15 years of Indonesian rule

15 years after the Indonesian invasion on 7 December 1975, East Timor displays all the hallmarks of a colonised territory: a strong military presence, a colonial administration and massive population control. On the other hand, there are many forms of resistance, creating immense difficulties for the military authorities in Jakarta and giving headaches to Indonesian diplomats.

The style and emphasis of Indonesian colonial rule may change from time to time, but one thing never changes: East Timor is an army project. In 1976 Suharto illegally incorporated East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province but the contrast with the islands of Indonesia is striking. The military presence in East Timor is patently obvious. Emphasis on security makes life very difficult for the East Timorese.

Brief military history

As with many military adventures, the architects of the invasion, generals Benny Murdani, Ali Murtopo, Panggabean and Suharto, expected to wrap up East Timor in a few days, but the huge Indonesian invasion only seized control of the capital Dili and other towns while the countryside remained in the hands of *Fretilin*. Together with the guerrilla forces, the majority of the population fled into the mountains. It took time for the Indonesian army to lick their wounds and rebuild their weapons arsenal. In September 1977, the army under its new commander, General Yusuf, started his *extermination and annihilation campaign*. The main aim was to destroy the backbone of the resistance and force the population into the lowland areas. Aerial bombardment and massive troop movements encircled the centres of the resistance in the mountains.

This savage campaign which lasted till March 1979 had a devastating effect; tens of thousands were killed and the agricultural system was destroyed, causing widespread famine and disease. The East Timorese were forced to leave their shelters and came under the control of the Indonesians. The Indonesian army continued its policy of exterminating the guerilla forces while herding the population in resettlement camps. Although it inflicted a terrible blow on Fretilin, the resistance reorganised itself, re-emerging in the 1980s under the leadership of Shanana Gusmao.

In the early 1980s, a different of military operation was launched, drawing East Timorese into war operations. These included using East Timorese in army battalions or paramilitary units and using the *pagar betis* (fence of legs) strategy of conscripting large numbers of civilians to move ahead of Indonesian troops, encircling an area where guerrillas are thought to be hiding. As the noose tightens, the guerrillas are forced into the open and captured or shot. In May 1981 a nationwide fence of legs operation was launched; code-named *Operasi Keamanan* or Security Operation, military circles in Jakarta called this *perang terachir* or the final war. This operation also had a devastating effect on the population. Virtually all men aged 15 to 50 were forced to join, leaving their families without food and abandoning crops for many months. Although the army later admitted that the operation had failed to obliterate the guerillas, the fence of legs operation was later used over and over again, though on a much smaller scale.

Later in the eighties, military strategy gradually shifted. Instead of using territorial troops (battalions from different parts of Indonesia), the army opted for counter-insurgency. In 1983-84, after the collapse of peace talks between Colonel Purwanto and *Falintil* commander Shanana Gusmao, the army launched its last 'old-style' offensive, using everything - warships, tanks, airplanes, mortars, cannons and large numbers of territorial troops.

From 1986-87, the switch to counter-insurgency which Benny Murdani describes as 'territorial guerilla warfare'. became apparent. Elite troops with special training in counter-insurgency warfare are used instead of territorial troops. A smaller number of troops are used in well-planned operations lasting for a fixed period of time. It involves a wide dispersal of forces, functioning in small units. In 1988 a larger scale counter-insurgency attack was launched. Since 1989, this has become the main strategy, being constantly refined and nowadays using Timorese counter-insurgency troops to fight East Timorese guerillas.

At every stage of the war, *Falintil* has adopted strategies to correspond to the changes in the Indonesian strategy. The latest strategy has created difficulties for the guerillas; the heightened mobility of army units keeps the resistance constantly on the move. Larger battles rarely occur as both sides operate in small units. These days, guerrilla ambushes involve a maximum of ten well-prepared guerillas.

Parallel population control

The different periods of the war and military strategy has affected the army's strategy for controlling the population. Social scientists from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta in a report last year about conditions in East Timor noted what they called a continuance of a war situation with society still living in a trauma.

The way the population has been controlled reflects the different stages of the war. In the early period, the Indonesians only controlled the towns while the population stayed with the resistance. Only after the military campaign of 1977-1979 did the population come under Indonesian control. These years of war brought terrible devastation: a third of the population was killed directly or indirectly because of the war while an estimated 80% of the population were uprooted. The distraught population were herded into *daerah pemukiman* or resettlement areas, some 145 of which were set up. The hastily created camps had on average 2,000 people; the sites were chosen at random, mostly where food production was hardly possible.

The key aim was to separate the population from the guerrillas, but they failed to for several reasons: having been set up in a haphazard fashion, they were easily penetrated by the reorganised guerrilla forces. Conditions

were so deplorable that inhabitants either choose to defect and join the resistance or become part of the underground network in the camps. The army was compelled to rethink the population policy and, in line with the new military strategy of involving Timorese in the war, new camps were created, situated along new asphalt roads, built by the Indonesian army to serve several purposes. Army strategists realised that security would be better served if people coming from the same village were regrouped together. The new sites were better chosen and in some instances it became possible for the population to start growing food again by tending small vegetable plots.

Limited transmigration

In the mid eighties some *desa teladan* or model villages were developed as 'showcases', by East Timorese and transmigrants from East Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta and Bali. This model was intended to herald the start of large-scale transmigration of Javanese and Balinese to East Timor but for a variety of reasons, the scheme collapsed: most Javanese and Balinese, having heard about the grave situation in East Timor, were not attracted to go there; the East Timorese, having suffered badly at the hands the Indonesians and lost land and property, did not take kindly to the newcomers. At the same time transmigration became a target of criticism from inside and outside the country and the Jakarta authorities had to put a brake on the programme.

But there has been large-scale spontaneous migration of Indonesians into East Timor. Petty traders from East Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi and Buton have found their way to East Timor. Together with civil servants, they account for an estimated 35,000 Indonesians. East Timorese are bitter about this influx. It is deeply offensive to see newcomers nudging their way in, gaining control of the administration, running the schools, shops and market-places and causing urban populations to soar. Indonesians from all walks of life, soldiers, teachers, construction workers, cobblers, street hawkers and tailors, have moved in, transforming life in towns like Dili, Baucau, Lospalos, Viqueque, Manatuto, Ermera, Ainaro and Liquisa. Unemployment has risen while those who get jobs are mostly Indonesians.

In the late eighties, a third wave of population upheaval occurred, allowing groups of people to return and rebuild their abandoned villages. The authorities realised that the original village sites were the best places to live and produce food. Moreover, having villages scattered in the interior would serve a security objective. At the same time, an effort was made to develop a plantation economy by requiring people to grow cash crops like coconuts, kapok and boost the yield of the famous Timor coffee. This new population policy reflected the two-pronged strategy; the counter-insurgency method of using elite forces, while the East Timor Wiradharma military command initiated a 'smiling policy', *Operasi Senyum.* As early as 1986 Colonel Yunus Yosfiah, Wiradharma military commander, said the best way to cope with armed resistance was to improve the living standards of the people. The territorial soldiers were instructed to set up 'model gardens' in the new villages, build fish ponds and so on. The present commander, Brigadier-General Rudy Warouw, has revived this approach but it is hardly likely to improve overall conditions.

In 1989, the security requirements of the Pope's visit led to special operations commanded by Colonel Prabowo which earned him a terrible reputation for brutality. Nor could 'smiling' be said to be characteristic of Colonel Mulyadi's term as commander of the Wiradharma command up to the end of 1989.

With all its chops and changes, Indonesia's strategy of population control remains integral to the overall military strategy of *hankamrata*, the concept of territorial management and territorial warfare. The new villages may be an improvement on the earlier resettlement camps but they are integral to the military strategy of control. Nor has freedom of movement be restored. The security approach of the Indonesian army continues to be the dominant factor.

The East Timorese are as ever unwilling to cooperate in anything emanating from the Indonesians. Deep distrust of the Indonesian military persists while the arrogant topdown approach of the average Indonesian soldier can only widen the cleavage.

The colonial administration

After much high-level confusion in Jakarta following a call by Governor Mario Carrascalao for the region to be 'opened up', it was decided at the end of 1988 to grant East Timor equal status with Indonesian provinces, thus acknowledging the former special status of East Timor. Two years on, East Timor has retained most of its special features, the only difference being a small trickle of tourists (1,190 in 1989, and 1,223 in 1990). The main feature is still the military structure. Until December 1989, it was run as a special military command, *Komando Operasi Keamanan Timor Timur (Koopskam TimTim)*, Operational Security Command for East Timor, but now it has a different name *Komando Pelaksanaan Ketertiban Operasi Timor Timur (Kolakskop TimTim)* or Command for Implementing Order in East Timor. Till 1989, the special command existed side by side with the East Timor military command, operating under a different command structure, subordinated to army headquarters in Jakarta, not to the regional military command in Bali. With *Kolakskop*, both commands seem to be fused under one military commander who concurrently holds both command positions. This special command structure has top priority and possesses all the most advanced and best-equipped material and personnel.

From top to bottom, the civilian provincial administration is integrated into the military and police structure. For instance, the districts are governed by bodies called *tripida*, or triple regional leadership composed of the local military commander, the local police chief and the district head. The two uniformed chiefs are Indonesians while the district chief is usually a Timorese. On top of this, the Timorese district chief usually functions in tandem with an army intelligence officer who handles administrative duties while keeping a close watch on the Timorese official. Any Timorese in a position of leadership, including Governor Carrascalao, has an Indonesian military minder. The governor's only power is to implement decisions taken in Jakarta; the same applies to lower-level officials.

Occasionally, when policy disputes occur in Jakarta, Governor Carrascalao can exert some influence, using the narrow margins allowed him. He was able to raise the 'opening-up' issue in 1988, which led to heated controversy

between the army and the foreign affairs department. Foreign Minister Ali Alatas pleaded opening the territory because Indonesia was the target of international criticism because of lack of access to East Timor. Indonesian diplomats argued that they could not plausibly defend the East Timor issue if nothing changed. They argued that outsiders should be allowed to enter East Timor and may even be persuaded to believe that everything was fine.

The military argued strongly against it, for security and economic reasons. The army feared that things on the security front could get out of control – which indeed happened. Since 1988, the East Timorese youth have utilised the slight opening of East Timor to their advantage. Several visit from outsiders have become rallying points to express opposition to Indonesian rule. The economic motive for the army's objection was fear of losing its monopolistic grip over the East Timor economy. All economic activity in East Timor, the coffee trade, the department stores, road construction and development projects like school and office buildings and imports and exports, are directly run or controlled by the army. An economic opening, Governor Carrascalao hoped, would allow a free market to develop.

President Suharto took the side of Alatas and Carrascalao and gave the green light to the opening up on 29 December 1988. So far, this has achieved virtually nothing economically. Foreign investors have shown no interest in investing in East Timor, nor are Indonesian entrepreneurs queuing up to invest in East Timor. So far, the military have managed to keep their stranglehold over the economy.

On the security front, General Benny Murdani, the Minister of Defence, admitted that when Indonesian or foreign officials go to East Timor, it "will certainly become quite a big problem". Addressing Timorese officials in February 1990, Murdani warned that the armed forces would crush the resistance movement. Notwithstanding this threat, the 'smiling policy' seems to have prevailed, at least until the last quarter of 1990.

The opening up of East Timor has remained a controversial issue and has brought no improvement or relaxation in East Timor. The military have responded to unrest with heavy-handed repression, despite the presence of foreigners. *New York Times* correspondent Steve Erlanger on 21 October 1990, in an article entitled "East Timor, reopened by the Indonesians, remains a sad and terrifying place". reported that Asian and Pacific diplomats just back from a visit to East Timor "were stunned by the mood prevailing in Dili".

The church in East Timor

As with everything else these last fifteen years, the Catholic church has also undergone a transformation. The mass conversion of Timorese has meant that the population sees the church as a protection against Indonesian atrocities. Jakarta expects the church to support government programmes and refrain from getting involved in politics. Yet, the church cannot close its eyes to social and political problems resulting from the Indonesian annexation. The church faces a daily dilemma: if it is seen as protecting government's interests, the people will distance themselves, but if it sides with the people, it lands in difficulties with the government. In an situation where no political channels exist, where people cannot express their political aspirations, the church is often used as an outlet. The Papal Mass in October 1989 and the mass to celebrate the 50th birthday of the diocese of Dili in September 1990, turned into mass demonstrations for independence.

The church sways, at times having a kind of 'cease-fire' with the army, at times antagonistic towards the government as when Bishop Belo wrote to the UN Secretary-General in February 1989 asking for a referendum. A recent outburst from Rear Admiral Sudibyo Rahardjo, chief of general staff of the armed forces, gave a clear indication of another difficult period for the church. In January 1991, he accused the church of being behind a rash of demonstrations opposing Jakarta's rule. Recalling the demonstration during the Pope's visit, he said: "They were teenage boys, all from a Catholic school. I'm sorry to say it but the church is behind this. The Catholic Church is the best organised force in the world and very well financed". This could herald a clampdown on church activities or an 'invitation' to some priests to depart. Little is known about the strength of liberation theology in East Timor but both Timorese and foreign priests are dissatisfied with being expected to mobilise people in support of government programmes.

Shanana Gusmao has spoken sympathetically about the role of the church. In his recent interview with Robert Domm, he cautioned the clergy not to go too far against the Indonesians. "The clergy plays an indirect but very committed role, in the sense that actions of the Church have strengthened the popular, patriotic consciousness and helped the people see that we are the Maubere people and have nothing in common with the Indonesians. The Church has not spoken out openly; the clergy have not acted in a public or indiscreet way, but with intelligence in order to continue to be on the peoples' side".

Integration, an Indonesian myth

After 15 years of 'integration', it can be concluded that the Indonesians have failed in every field. Animosity and contempt towards Indonesians have deepened, the attempt to win the hearts and minds of the young Timorese has been counter-productive. Teachers complain of bad behaviour and lack of interest of the schools. The youth have carried forward the banner of struggle from the older generation, developing new forms of resistance. However impressive on paper, development programmes have not benefitted the Timorese. It is the Indonesian army who is reaping the harvest while the average Timorese sees the army as the cause of the economic crisis. Allocation of government funds usually fail to reach their proper destination, because of corruption. One volatile issue is land. The uprooting of the population has left huge tracts of land empty and untended. To claim ownership, Timorese need to produce title deeds which most do not possess. Many newcomers from Indonesia are buying up land, creating deep resentment. In the meantime the Timorese fear persecution and repression. They are not able to live according to their own customs and traditions. Lack of basic needs – food and health care in particular – makes living in East Timor like living a hell. The only just solution is for the East Timorese to be able to determine their own fate and political destiny.

Liem Soei Liong, January 1991